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# Can We Execute a Strategy for Increasing Competitiveness? The Athenian Paradigm and Civic Culture

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# **CAN WE EXECUTE A STRATEGY FOR INCREASING COMPETITIVENESS?**

## **THE ATHENIAN PARADIGM AND CIVIC CULTURE**

**Lawrence J. Johnson**  
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### **Abstract**

In the 1992 presidential election campaigns, all the candidates agreed that a program of educational reforms was essential if the nation was to increase its rate of productivity growth. Further, all agreed on the nature of those essential reforms.

Yet, for all of this broad-based support, a national strategy to effect such reforms is at risk.

This study offers a new perspective on American pluralism as it manifests itself in our civic culture, tracing its roots back to Periclean Athens. It documents the persistence of Homeric, Protagorean, Platonic and Aristotlean strains in this culture, and describes the ways in which each of these strains shapes our debates about this critical strategy.

Through such an analysis we come to see better first why this strategy for increased competitiveness had such widespread appeal during the campaigns, drawing as it did on values that have long shaped Western civic culture and that acquired particular prominence in "the more perfect union" shaped by our Founding Fathers. At the same time, we also come to see better the many challenges posed by that complex of values, and the risks it poses to those who would move to implement such a strategy in this democratic society.

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*Q: Mr Ghandi, what do you think of American culture?*

*A: It would be nice if they had one.*

Strategists too often tend to assume that our civic culture--the behaviors that manifest themselves in our public decision-making--is relatively homogeneous and monolithic. That assumption may be fatal.

We all recognize that this nation formed itself *e pluribus* but we may not have as yet explored the full implications of that process. Thus I argue that consideration should be given to the possibility that we who participate in this civic culture continue to perceive, speak, and operate from multiple perspectives whose origins lie deep in our common cultural past, a past which transcends ethnic differences and can be traced back to ancient Greece. I would further argue that we draw upon these multiple traditions--which I group together as the "Athenian paradigm"--in our democratic decision-making processes. Finally, I would argue that these multiple traditions have the potential both to reinforce one another and to counteract one another over the course of our civic debates about strategy.

In support of such claims, I would propose that we examine how these traditions might affect a specific national strategy that apparently enjoys widespread support from across the political spectrum: a new educational strategy designed to increase national productivity and competitiveness. As we look more closely at the traditions which shape the various components of that strategy (as well as the arguments of its opponents), we can begin to see more clearly both the persistence and the importance of this Athenian paradigm in the formulation of strategy within our civic culture.

Such an examination will reveal how these heterogeneous traditions shaping our civic

culture initially give rise to and support the formulation of such a strategy, broadening its appeal. But it will also reveal how those same elements in our civic culture can inhibit, sometimes fatally, the execution of such a strategy. The task of any strategist is compounded if it is necessary to take into account such complexity in our civic culture. But those who recognize it are better prepared to exploit the unique strengths of American civic culture, both formulating and implementing a national strategy with greater assurance of its success.

### **An emerging strategic consensus**

Integral to "[t]he survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure" is "[a] healthy and growing economy to ensure opportunity for individual prosperity and resources for national endeavors at home and abroad."<sup>1</sup> And with the end of the Cold War, the health and vitality of the U.S. economy has assumed paramount importance in our public debates, as evidenced by the electorate's overwhelming concern with the economy, and not national defense, in the most recent elections.

Thus all the candidates in the recent presidential elections addressed the issue of U.S. competitiveness in a world where, as President Bush had noted in 1991, "we frequently find ourselves competitors [with Japan and Germany]--sometimes even bitter competitors --in the economic arena."<sup>2</sup> And while there were major differences among the candidates about the problems of the deficit, entitlement programs, and the role of government, there was substantive unanimity about the importance of increasing the rate of increase in U.S. productivity in order to make the U.S. more competitive in the global market.

Further, a remarkable consensus emerged in this campaign about how such increases in productivity could be achieved: all three candidates called for an increased responsiveness and efficiency in American industry, achieved in large part through one of the means for increasing productivity: a better educated workforce from a reformed educational system.

And finally, a specific strategy for achieving such objectives can be discerned from the published works of individuals and groups generally acknowledged to be influential in a Democratic administration. While some are unabashedly partisan,<sup>3</sup> their analysis is remarkably congruent with that emanating from more broadly-based coalitions.<sup>4</sup> Thus it can be claimed that we not only have a general consensus on an agenda (given the common concerns articulated by Bush, Clinton and Perot) but also a specific strategy ready for addressing that agenda, one that has broad, bipartisan support for its validity and appropriateness. That seems to be a good start towards implementing that national strategy.

### **The centrality of deliberate change**

But there have been many "good starts" in our society -- the "Great Society" is one that stands out for both its promise and its failures. And the strategy before us is even more daunting, for it entails comprehensive changes in two of our most central institutions: the traditionally intertwined structures of American business and education. Further, it is not merely a matter of formal restructuring; rather, it depends for its success upon an equally deliberate change in our corporate and educational operations, a far more difficult proposition. If such a strategy is to be implemented successfully, individual citizens first must commit themselves to underwriting the substantial costs of such a change. More



centrally, they must be willing to accept and then implement a changed vision of themselves as both individuals and groups, first in coming to consensus about such a strategy and then in actualizing it in their private and public lives.

There is now, in short, the perception that the new world economic order limits our response time, our individual autonomy, and our options.<sup>5</sup> Those who espouse this strategy for increasing productivity clearly recognize those limits: they identify immediate threats and call for immediate action; they are unwilling to rely on fortuitous historical evolution, and instead call for governmental leadership through the formulation and implementation of a national strategy; and if this strategy is not implemented, they can see nothing but economic disaster, for both individuals and the nation.

### **Civic culture and strategy**

The consideration of the cultural component in the formulation of strategy is receiving increasing attention. Writing about security strategy, Colin S. Gray defines culture as

the socially transmitted habits of mind, traditions, and preferred methods of operations that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community

which, when recognized, assist in understanding

what societies are about in their security policies; to understand where particular strategic objectives and ideas come from; and generally to maximize the probability that important connections between apparently separate streams of behavior will not pass unnoticed.<sup>6</sup>

Such a definition of culture for such strategic planning purposes is equally applicable in examining a nation's own economic strategy, for while our nation's very existence is not at stake in the short term, it is in the long term, thus making such a strategy equally critical.

The inherent difficulty of undertaking such an analysis is compounded by the divergent views of those who have already attempted to identify the nature of American strategic culture. A whole host of studies have claimed to identify a single factor characterizing American culture;<sup>7</sup> there are still others which analyze the American experience "in terms of its paradoxes, its contradictory tendencies, its dualisms, and its polarities."<sup>8</sup> Finally, there are the many voices raised in vehement debate about American multiculturalism.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, I believe that these analyses do not go far enough, and my research has suggested another approach towards understanding the American civic culture. This approach is best tested by first defining that widely held strategy for increasing U.S. productivity and then examining that strategy in light of the model I offer for analyzing our civic culture: the Athenian paradigm.

### **Strategy: a definition**

There are many definitions of "strategy," but one formulated by Victor H. Reis, Director of Defense Research and Engineering, helps to identify the point at which cultural considerations come into play in strategic planning. According to Mr. Reis,

\*A strategic plan consists of a vision, a desired future and a corresponding set of operating principles.

\*It forms the basis for decisions and actions and provides the foundation for long-range and short-range planning.

\*And it focuses people's energies and talents, motivating and directing them toward common goals.<sup>10</sup>

It is my contention that there now exists a widely held (but not universal) vision of a desirable future for U.S. competitiveness, together with a corresponding set of operating

principles to achieve that vision. But, I suggest, the competing cultural values inhering in our society can either work for or against the translation of that vision into decisions, actions, and plans congruent with that vision. And, whatever decisions and plans may arise from such a vision, these competing cultural values will all too often work against the focusing of peoples' energies and talents, directing them instead towards a heterogeneous set of personal goals, all of which can find sanction in some segment of our cultural paradigm.

### **The Strategy for raising American productivity**

The prevalent, bi-partisan strategic vision for U.S. competitiveness is derived from a common perception of a present problem--the strikingly low average increase in labor productivity in the U.S., compared to that in Germany and Japan<sup>11</sup>. That has given rise to a common desire to achieve once again a rate of increase at least comparable to or greater than that of our economic competitors. Such an increase is considered vital because it is an index of an economy's vigor<sup>12</sup>, a key to improvements in output, wages and national income<sup>13</sup>, and, for many, a measure of a nation's preeminence<sup>14</sup>. Finally, it is a patently reasonable vision, given that we have in the past achieved such rates of increase and that other nations are currently achieving them in a global economy.

There is the same consensus about the operating principles which must be observed in order to achieve the desired increases in the rate of productivity growth. While partisan economic philosophies may differ radically, there is an overwhelming consensus that such a desirable increase can be attained only by focusing on the human potential to be found in the citizenry. It is generally agreed that new resources are no longer an option and that

improvements in technology are themselves dependent upon tapping into that human potential. As the MIT Commission on Industrial Productivity puts it:

We have concluded that without major changes in the ways schools and firms train workers over the course of a lifetime, no amount of macroeconomic fine-tuning or technological innovation will be able to produce significantly improved economic performance and a rising standard of living.<sup>15</sup>

This principle was formally articulated as Presidential policy in President Clinton's first State of the Union Address.<sup>16</sup> It had, however, already been articulated by the Bush Administration<sup>17</sup>, echoed by Mr. Perot<sup>18</sup> and by bipartisan panels such as the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce<sup>19</sup> and set forth in greatest detail by Clinton advisors Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker.

These same heterogeneous sources also set forth three other operating principles for such a strategy. They first share a common concern that the effectiveness of the tactics employed in this strategy be carefully measured against objective statements of the problem; that data, not wishful thinking or partisan rhetoric, define the success or failure of the strategy. Those who share this strategic vision would agree with Ross Perot when he writes:

Parents should be able to know how their elementary school performs against the nation's and the world's. Employers need to know how their local school districts perform against others in their state. Principals and teachers need to see where they need to concentrate their resources for improvement. Right now we have a \$185 billion enterprise operating in the dark. We shouldn't be surprised that it doesn't work.<sup>20</sup>

Thus there is agreement that objective national standards should be set for measuring the progress towards the strategic goal. Standards are also needed to assess the relative effectiveness of innovations introduced to support it. Most importantly, such standards are central to any effort to validate objectively the economic and social benefits of such a

strategy to the satisfaction of those who are called upon to support and execute it.

That validation is especially critical because this strategy depends for its effectiveness upon an operating principle of inclusiveness unprecedented in American education. It targets the entire population: pre-schoolers, elementary and secondary students, college students, and workers at all levels and at all points in their careers.<sup>21</sup> Responsibility for execution of the strategy is placed on no one single institution; instead, each segment of society has a role to play, including the learners themselves, their teachers and employers, parents and public officials. Most significantly, the financial responsibility for such innovations is to be shared in new ways, with employers assuming a new and unprecedented part of the burden.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the operating principle of inclusiveness is counterpoised by the principle of equity. To raise the national rate of productivity increases, everyone must play a role in meeting the competitive challenge posed by other nations; if they do, everyone will benefit. There may be differences of opinion about the relative importance of the service and industrial sectors<sup>23</sup>, but the strategy is equally applicable in both. This strategy is intended to both increase the productivity of the American worker and to empower the unproductive segment of the population so that it too can participate in the benefits of such a strategy. Employers will bear more of the costs, but they will increase their efficiency and profits; parents will have to commit more of themselves and their resources to schools, but they and their children will benefit from an increased standard of living.

These four principles--educational reform, objective validation, inclusiveness and equity--harmoniously support the vision of an increasingly more productive America which shapes this strategy. Their ubiquity in the policy statements from all parts of the political

spectrum appears to suggest that there is a consensus for future decisions and actions, as well as a means of focusing the nation's energies and motivating and directing us all towards a common goal. But will our culture support this optimism?

### **The paradigm of Athenian civic culture revisited**

Trained as a classicist, I take exception to a tendency among political scientists to approach American civic culture as a *novus ordo seculorum*, even though that claim has great currency. Thus I would argue that our civic culture continues to be shaped by the convergence of ideas in Periclean Athens, from whence Western political discourse took its substance. The romantic image of Periclean Athens as the birthplace of a vibrant and eternal model of democracy is, I believe, severely compromised by a critical reading of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, however, I would argue that the complex civic culture of Athens as it evolved through the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. gave rise to the central elements of our present civic culture, which I see as an ever-changing mix of Homeric, Protagorean, Platonic, and Aristotelean strains--the Athenian paradigm.

It was in that period that the dominant ethos of the individual celebrated in Homer<sup>25</sup> was countered by the politically sophisticated and pragmatic Sophists represented by Protagoras.<sup>26</sup> He and his followers were skilled in persuasion and able to bring a divided assembly together in a common purpose, at least for the moment. Soon, however, Plato (schooled in the persuasive techniques of the Sophists but inspired by insights gained from the study of mathematical universals) offered a transcendent vision of the ideal. This ideal stood as an alternative to such Protagorean pragmatism, unattainable, perhaps, but eminently

- approachable for the betterment of a republic. Aristotle, searching for the universals his mentor Plato had despaired of finding in this world, turned to an examination of the world itself. Through his system of causal analysis and taxonomy, he invited Athenians to look into the world and not beyond it for system and meaning. (The relevant aspects of these divergent strains are reviewed at greater length in Appendix A.)

At the outset it is important to note that Athenian civic culture was additive: Protagoras and the Sophists did not supplant Homeric values, but rather integrated them into their practice of political persuasion. Similarly, Plato never banished Protagoras, but merely countered him by challenging the Sophists and those who followed them to look beyond the immediate to the ideal as the criterion for civic action, thus adding a new dimension to that political debate. Finally, Aristotle, even as he repudiated his old mentor in various particulars, merely offered Athenians another and more powerful way of looking at nature and through nature at politics (while quoting Homer whenever it suited his rhetorical purpose).

Thus I contend that at the end of the 4th century BC, Athenian civic culture afforded its participants an abundance of alternative analytic approaches for their use in formulating public policy. While all publicly honored Homer, some chose to cling to his antique social values; others, like Pericles, seeing the powers of persuasion proffered by Protagoras and his cohorts, sought to master that art to specific and finite ends and yet cited Homer when it suited their purposes. Still others sought to counter the venality empowered by the lore of the Sophists by equally powerful appeals to the utterly desirable and approachable but unattainable ideals promised to "lovers of wisdom" by Plato, all the while using the

techniques developed by the Sophists to make that appeal even more powerful. At the same time, there were those who were most impressed by the absoluteness of mathematical discoveries and the promise of emerging technologies. They were drawn to Aristotle, whose approach appeared to promise both the universal solutions achieved by mathematicians and a pragmatic "way to get things done" as tangible and productive as any proffered by Protagoras.

### **The uniqueness of the Athenian paradigm**

"Culture" usually implies a common set of values; members of a culture are generally thought to share a definition of "the good" and to base their individual and collective decisions upon that common definition. Hence, such decisions gain a significant level of consistency. Western culture, I suggest, is unique because the persistently ubiquitous Athenian paradigm sanctions not one but four definitions of the good:

- \*the Homeric good--for heroes, the maximization of individual potential in whatever direction that potential lies, without regard to its consequences for others; for ordinary people, the type of prudence that reduces their vulnerability to the whims of fate.

- \*the Protagorean good--that which diverse peoples can accept as a common objective for themselves with sufficient unanimity that allows them to act towards that objective.

- \*the Platonic good--an absolute and universal ideal that is (or should be) intuitively obvious and powerfully attractive to all at the instinctual level; its full appeal and entailments are approached (but never fully grasped) through the intellect.

- \*the Aristotlean good--that which most accords with the ordered nature of things, an order apparent in the behavior of those things as analyzed by reason and reflected in what we know today as science.



These four definitions of the good operate simultaneously (albeit with differing degrees of emphasis) throughout the history of Western political thought from Cicero to Hobbes and forward to our own day, each serving as the core of one of the strains in the Athenian paradigm.

That paradigm, moreover, is most pronounced in the political culture of the United States. It is firmly embedded in the conscious decisions made by the Founding Fathers as they shaped a new nation and a new political order and articulated the principles of this new polity in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and *The Federalist Papers*. The Declaration of Independence sets forth an Aristotelean case for the dissolution of ties with England because they are destructive of ends to which people are entitled by "The Law of Nature." Those ends--"Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness"-- are, in turn, Homeric, stressing as they do the desirability of individual self-actualization. The goal of the Constitution, however, is expressed as a Platonic good--"a more perfect Union"-- which is best achieved through the Protagorean processes of separation of powers and a bicameral legislature, as the dynamics are rationalized in the consensus-building efforts of the authors of *The Federalist Papers*. (How the paradigm survived to permeate our civic culture is outlined in Appendix B, together with examples of its persistence and power today.)

Both the manifestations and the implications of this Athenian paradigm will be explored in greater detail as we look more closely at the present strategy for increasing American productivity through educational reform. That strategy draws its initial appeal from its successful employment of various socio-cultural premisses available within the Athenian paradigm. At the same time, however, the discrete strains of that same paradigm

will ultimately be employed with equal force as both a common ground for decision making and as the basis for opposing such decisions. While they are available to motivate people to action, they will be equally serviceable for those who would resist translating that strategy into action.

### **The Aristotlean strain**

The Aristotlean strain, though the last to surface in Athens, is the most apparent in our efforts to formulate strategy. Since the Enlightenment set its twinned theses (articulated by Pope) that "what is, is right" and "The proper study of mankind is man," our civic discourse has frequently (but, as we shall see, not always) been predicated upon the principle that human behaviors are analyzable in Aristotlean terms, and those terms give rise to the idea of strategy itself. (See Appendix A, pp. 7f. for a fuller discussion of the Aristotlean model of analysis.)

Reis' definition of strategy faithfully follows the analytic model first put forth by Aristotle: his "vision" is Aristotle's "final cause," the end towards which a strategy would move; his "principles" and "plans" are the "formal causes" which must be observed if that strategy is to produce its desired end; the resources identified in such plans are the "material" essential to the execution of that strategy; and the "decisions and actions," the focused "energies and talents, motivated and directed towards common goals" are the efficient causes that make the strategy succeed in producing its desired outcome.

The power of the Aristotlean promise inherent in the Athenian paradigm is evident in the technological progress that has resulted from its application to the physical world. Its

problematic nature is equally apparent when we consider, for example, a recurring phenomenon most evident in Defense acquisition at the cutting edge of technology. There, while there may be an identified "vision" or "requirement," a lacuna in our understanding of the critical systems, materials, and/or processes needed to meet that requirement cause design failure with unsurprising frequency. Thus it should not be surprising that the Aristotlean promise, which cannot always be honored when dealing with inert physical substances, is even more vulnerable when it depends upon human actions and human motivations (which, as we shall see later, are more dependent upon the older traditions for their substance) to achieve its end.

That weakness extends across the Aristotlean causes when they are used to shape civic action. In the case of the strategy that is of interest to us, for example, it would appear that there is substantial unanimity about the "vision" that is the end of this strategy. Unlike the qualities of armor plate, however, which can be defined concretely against the known weaponry it will face, the intended purpose of a social strategy is eminently disputable. It can be rejected as unnecessary (and, thus, in Aristotlean terms, "unnatural"): this, for example, is implicit in Henry Nau's arguments<sup>27</sup> and in a report from the McKinsey Global Institute<sup>28</sup> which contend that our concerns about productivity growth are unwarranted, and that national policy should be directed in other directions. Paul Krugman, for his part, maintains that the "vision" driving this strategy is so problematic and un compelling that we will not bother to invest in it.<sup>29</sup>

Three of the principles upon which this strategy is based--objectivity, inclusiveness and equity --are equally disputable in the details of their execution. While "objectivity" is the

hallmark of Aristotlean analysis, such objectivity in this case depends upon a process of quantification which still remains subject to Samuel Clemens' Protagorean criticism: "Figures don't lie, but liars can figure." This principle is especially problematic in an arena central to this strategy: measuring the success of the strategy through programs of national testing for students and teachers. In reviewing the strategy formulations advanced by its various proponents, there is an Aristotlean optimism reflected in their assurances that such a valid testing program can be developed. The present reality, however, is that every such program that has been implemented to date has been attacked for various and persistent inadequacies as an integral part of the political conflict within our civic culture.<sup>30</sup> Proponents of this strategy have made powerful use of such test data to define the challenge facing us<sup>31</sup>, but that strategy remains vulnerable to this as yet unfulfilled Aristotlean expectation of an uncontrovertible proof structure.

The principles of inclusiveness and equity are even more problematic from an Aristotlean perspective, for they run directly counter to another Aristotlean premise still operative in American society as a means for drawing social distinctions. Aristotle argued that, in order to understand rightly the nature of a thing through its processes, we must first discriminate between things that operate in similar fashion--and thus share a common nature about which universal statements can be made--and those that operate in dissimilar fashion and which therefore must be analyzed separately. From this came the principles of taxonomy that operate to great effect in our sciences today.

But Aristotle extended that taxonomic principle into the social realm, thus supporting class distinctions based upon natural capacities and the distinct functions supported by those

differing capacities. Each social group, he and countless generations of his successors to the present day argue, is defined by its unique functions. Those distinct sets of functions, however, are each delimited by the demonstrable capacity of its members to exercise those functions. From such distinctions comes the definition of both what rights members of any group may enjoy and what responsibilities they must meet.

That is a principle that is easier to articulate than it is to objectify; in the main, it has been used more successfully to justify the status quo than as an argument for change. Thus any strategy that attempts to redistribute either "rights" or "responsibilities" (as this strategy does by espousing a new inclusiveness and a new equity) runs the risk of running aground on established social distinctions. This difficulty is recognized to a point by the proponents of this strategy. They do not argue for John Dewey's intellectual egalitarianism<sup>32</sup>; rather they retain the various Aristotlean distinctions currently existing within the American educational system, proposing instead to promote productivity growth by reforming each historic stratum of society within its own sphere.

But though the "rights" to be engendered by this strategy are intended to be equitable, though not egalitarian, the equitability of the "responsibility" for the execution of this strategy will be endlessly debated. Tucker and Marshall provide ample evidence of this problem in their analysis of efforts to institute some reforms recommended by a Carnegie task force<sup>33</sup> in the Rochester (N.Y) City School District. They use this example as evidence of "some of the complexity of the restructuring agenda and the time it will take to implement that agenda."<sup>34</sup> But read closely, this example encapsulates the conflict centering about the assignment of rights and responsibilities, a conflict which, at the time the authors wrote, was

unresolved after five years of intense community attention<sup>35</sup>. An extrapolation of this case suggests that the execution of any such strategy will be similarly impeded. The explanation is obvious: while the literature since Aristotle is filled with theoretical analyses of rights and responsibilities, no political process has yet been found to produce support among those who must shoulder greater responsibilities without a commensurate increase in rights.

The socio-cultural premisses evolving from Aristotle's approach and inhering in today's Athenian paradigm of American civic culture give this strategy both its shape and its initial appeal: a strategy implies that something can be done about a problem, and the identification of specific ways and means to that end cloak that strategy in a mantle of systematic reasonableness. Beneath that mantle, however, lie both the contradictions and obfuscations that were never resolved by Aristotle and his descendants, reinforced by opposing socio-cultural premisses promulgated by his predecessors and active still in this paradigm of civic culture.

### **The Platonic strain**

This strategy for increasing productivity growth takes its form from the Aristotlean tradition. That tradition, however, cannot account for the idealism that permeates this strategy. For that we must look to the Platonic element in the Athenian paradigm which also both strengthens the appeal of the strategy in significant ways and at the same time opens it up to further challenges.

Plato's ubiquity in our civic culture is largely transparent because of the uses to which his thought was put by millennia of Christian theologians. Of most relevance to this present

discussion, however, are three features of his thought: his open-ended and ameliorative idealism, his concept of knowledge, and his critical methodology as manifest in his attacks upon the Sophists in his dialogues. (See Appendix A, pp. 6f.)

Each of these uniquely Platonic ideas shape the way this strategy for increasing productivity is received within our civic culture. The vision shaping this strategy is based upon a Platonic assumption: our potential for improvement is limited only by our willingness to make the effort such improvement requires. In this strategy, it is assumed that increases in the rate of productivity growth are there to be gained if we are willing to change intelligently the way we have been doing things. Formulated as "Where there's a will, there's a way," this Platonic optimism permeates our strategic thinking: when our Aristotlean analyses reveal that the processes which limit us appear to be beyond our control, it provokes us to "look harder" for the solution we are confident is there to be found. Without this Platonic optimism to counter them, the systemic constraints on productivity growth identified by Krugman and others<sup>36</sup> would long ago have stifled the emergence of this strategy. With that Platonic optimism, we are encouraged to engage in this pursuit of excellence, confident that we can overcome those systemic constraints through our own conscious efforts.

The central principle driving this strategy is equally dependent upon the Platonic component of the Athenian paradigm in its focus on education as the path to collective growth and on a new type of worker, capable of life-long learning and effective decision-making. In their condemnation of "Taylorite" industrial practices and the educational system that supports those practices<sup>37</sup>, Marshall and Tucker are repudiating an Aristotlean model of education in which individuals are trained for specific but limited functions. In its place, they

offer a Platonic vision of a worker prepared to drive the increased rate of productivity growth: this strategy, they claim, will insure that "all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment."<sup>38</sup> This strategy promises to bring everyone out of Plato's cave and into the light.

And finally, the advocates of such a strategy have wrapped themselves in Plato's mantle by taking a stance that challenges conventional wisdom about our industries and schools. In comparing our "outdated" programs to the "advanced practices" of other enlightened countries, they claim to find a greater wisdom in those practices which they would offer to the unenlightened. In doing so, they assume the superior position first claimed by the individual who went outside Plato's cave and saw the light, and then was obliged to go back inside and bring the good news to those who remained in darkness.

But this strategy is, at the same time, vulnerable to attack from this same tradition within the Athenian paradigm. Plato's idealism was never egalitarian; it was pursued only by the very few who were capable of becoming "philosopher kings." In its adoption of the Platonic vision, Christianity was even more pessimistic about the possibility of ameliorative efforts in this vale of tears. And that pessimism is shared by many today, as documented by a striking study of the disparity between public perceptions and expert opinions on American competitiveness<sup>39</sup>. There is a wide-spread public perception that attitudes and motivation, not skills or training, are the cause and the cure of the problem<sup>40</sup>. Further, there is a wide-spread public skepticism about the efficacy of such an "investment," given the perceived failures of earlier programs<sup>41</sup>. And finally, there are those whom Samuel P. Huntington



- dismisses as "declinists"<sup>42</sup> but who have nonetheless persuaded many that U.S. options are severely constrained no matter what we attempt to do.

Further, this Platonic tradition calls into bold relief the dichotomy between "skills" and "thinking" that runs from Plato through Aristotle to our own educational theories, a dichotomy glossed over by proponents of the strategy before us. As Richard Hofstadter characterizes the American educational philosophy emerging in the early decades of the 20th century, the child was conceived "not as a mind to be developed but as a citizen to be trained by the schools."<sup>43</sup> Thus while Robert Reich and others envision a new world where "symbolic analysis" permeates the production line and the in-person service sector<sup>44</sup>, much of the public still "seems to yearn for the little red schoolhouse of the 19th century, with its emphasis on basic skills and traditional values."<sup>45</sup> This chasm remains a serious threat to the implementation of our strategy.

Finally, the Platonic tradition licenses these very challenges to this strategy. Just as Plato challenged the vision of the Sophists, so Nau and others challenge the vision which shapes this strategy, asking the Platonic question "Is this really the problem?" And that license to challenge reaches down to the very principles upon which the strategy is based. This license is used by (1) those who would advocate a "new protectionism" (rather than a strategy of increasing productivity) as our best means to a new competitiveness, (2) those who abhor the rhetoric of testing as nothing more than a perverse form of social control and a personal intrusion <sup>46</sup>, and (3) all of those who would challenge the way in which the responsibility for such a strategy should be distributed. In pursuing the truth by illuminating the specious, Plato inspired a process of debate whose length often precludes the execution of

any strategy.

### **Protagoras and the Sophistic strain**

It is my somewhat perverse contention that Protagoras and the Sophists created and sustained the democratic processes by which this strategy for increasing competitiveness is advanced in our civic culture. More conventionally, however, I also contend that their "lore," passed down over the ages in the company of their arch-foes Plato and Aristotle, now serves as much to diffuse as it does to focus people's energies and talents towards a common goal. (See Appendix A, pp. 3-6.)

Democratic political processes, more than any other, depend upon consensus building, and it was Protagoras and the Sophists who first showed how such consensus could be built. This strategy for increased productivity growth--and any national strategy--cannot be implemented without such consensus. As noted at the outset of this analysis, the emergence of the vision shaping this strategy appears to have achieved such a consensus. Further, the search for continued consensus on means is an intrinsic part of the strategy. It is worth noting, for example, how President Bush celebrates the fact that "our goals have been forged in partnership with the nation's governors"<sup>47</sup> even though those recommendations were formed under the leadership of then Governor Clinton. In their turn, Clinton supporters Marshall and Tucker claim consensus by celebrating President Bush's idealism:

There were deep divisions between the White House and the governors on many specific issues of substance and procedure. It must surely have been tempting to both sides to play out these differences in the press, which almost certainly would have happened if the parties had only been seeking short-term political advantage from the occasion. But it did not. They knew they were working on a task of great importance to the nation.<sup>48</sup>

"Importance to the nation" was the cornerstone of Pericles' plea for consensus in his Funeral Oration, and remains no less effective today. Japan and Germany, and not Sparta, may be putting this country at risk, but the argument for consensus remains undimmed by time: "Since a state can support individuals in their suffering, but no one person by himself can bear the load that rests upon the state, is it not right for us all to now rally?"

And as it is formulated, this strategy never assumes consensus but is always eager to build it. Thus the principles upon which it is founded--education as the means, and objective measurement, inclusiveness and equity--may be rooted in other strains of the Athenian paradigm, but they are employed to the Protagorean purpose of building consensus. Everyone, its proponents profess to believe, recognizes the power of education; everyone knows that success or failure can and should be measured, that everyone has to benefit if everyone is expected to bear part of the burden.

The impediments to consensus recognized by the Sophists, however, are not so readily acknowledged in the formulation of this strategy. Foremost among these impediments are the unacknowledged biases and preconceptions of the public, a threat recognized by the Business-Higher Education Forum in its documentation of twelve substantive gaps between what the public perceives and what the experts and leaders think about the issues addressed by this strategy.<sup>49</sup> In response, the Forum can only conclude:

Too often, leaders who want the public's attention violate the cardinal rule for getting people to listen to what you have to say: You must talk about what's on their minds as well as what's on yours. In the focus groups conducted for this project, people showed a remarkable ability to listen carefully to leadership's agenda, as well as voicing their own. The public's open-mindedness might be something some leaders would be well advised to emulate. A sincere attempt to *communicate with* the public--as opposed to *talking at* them--has genuine prospects for success as long as it is

grounded in an understanding of the perceptions and misperceptions that have blocked real public involvement in the competitiveness issue.<sup>50</sup>

Protagoras would call that approach the essence of "virtue."

But not all would see it so, and that is the problem posed by the Protagorean strain in our civic culture. The Protagorean tradition has also given rise to a suspicion about any and all attempts to elicit "consensus." Madison and Jefferson feared the power of demagogues in creating a false consensus among the masses; the populist reformers of the late 19th century railed against the self-serving rhetoric of the moneyed few; and today, authors such as John Kenneth Galbraith<sup>51</sup>, Kevin Phillips<sup>52</sup> and Ernest Fitzgerald<sup>53</sup> have spoken for the many who have come to believe that any appeal for action "in the common good" is in fact the beginnings of a process designed to benefit a fortunate few at the expense of the many. While Protagoras and his successors always stressed that a speaker must present himself as the model of probity, that is infinitely more difficult when 2000 years of experience with the gap between that illusion and the reality has hardened us to such appeals and strengthened our much older suspicions of those who would ask us to give up our hard-earned goods.

### **The Homeric strain**

The oldest component of the Athenian paradigm, the Homeric strain, has filtered through its successors in many guises as each adopted Homer's graphic images within their particular ideological framework. But it survives today, providing another dimension to the strategy for increased competitiveness.

Stripped of the ideological garments supplied by his successors, Homer can be seen to give Western civic culture an enduring vision of "competitiveness." But concomitant with

such a vision, he also defines the limits of such an ambition: his "great competitors" must all come to terms with those forces beyond their control which almost inevitably constrain the achievement of such an ambition. Those constraints, defined more vividly for the ordinary citizen by Homer's contemporary Hesiod, are an integral part of the Homeric strain. The Homeric hero's pursuit of a unique destiny, his personal responsibility for total commitment to that pursuit regardless of its problematic outcomes, and the lurking threat of the chaos that brings down even the greatest of heroes each still influence the formulation of strategy today. (See Appendix A, pp. 1-3.)

It is the Homeric vision of excellence (or *arete*), transferred from the individual to a nation, that shapes our pursuit of global preeminence in productivity growth. Pericles initiated that transfer when, in his Funeral Oration, he argued that the historic superiority demonstrated by the Athenian people compelled them to take extraordinary steps to sustain that superiority. Virgil completed that transfer, tying all the extraordinary actions of his hero Aeneas explicitly to the eventuation of the equally extraordinary destiny of the Roman state. In the same way, the historic superiority of U.S. productivity now justifies heroic efforts in not only sustaining our level of productivity (which is not the issue) but increasing the rate at which that productivity increases. The persistence of this Homeric impulse, I suggest, alone accounts for the often visceral but always unyielding rejection of the Aristotlean analyses offered by "declinists" such as Kennedy and Krugman. It shapes the rhetoric of "America's choice" that permeates this strategy, the claim that we only have to decide to regain our lead and act on that decision to achieve our goals. And it shapes the public's belief that regaining the lead in productivity growth is only a matter of "will and effort."

But, despite its adaption to nationalistic ends, the Homeric vision remains one of personal responsibility, a vision reinforced by Plato, Aristotle, and their Christian heirs. The free market itself, I contend, may be described in Aristotlean terms but the entrepreneur who makes that free market work is as self-directed and as self-motivated as any Homeric hero: it is in doing what is best for themselves that, as Adam Smith noted, people are "led by an invisible hand" to promote the economic well-being of society as a whole. This strategy appeals to that Homeric sense of personal responsibility, challenging all members of society to each put forth extraordinary efforts, each in their own way, to achieve this heroic end.

That same heroic sensibility, however, is easily turned against a collective strategy, and that is a real risk facing this contemporary economic strategy. In celebrating their own economic heroism, those who see themselves as having achieved some economic success can easily disclaim any responsibility for the success or failure of others. As the Business-Higher Education Forum findings indicate, that attitude has already colored the popular understanding of the problem to be addressed by this strategy: the public perceives our troubles as a moral failing, a question of "will" and "effort" that is lacking in our society (among others, not themselves). By charging others with moral irresponsibility, with a failure to live up to their God-given destiny, we can easily deny any personal responsibility for the common good that, for any reason, is too onerous for us to accept. Thus we justify our non-participation in such a strategy.

Finally, we bemoan the growing prevalence of "voter apathy," but then dismiss it as a natural consequence of the democratic process. It is more useful, I think, to view it rather as a persistent manifestation of the dark side of the Homeric vision, whose persistent power

was reinforced by two thousand years of Christian teachings about a fallen world and the imperfectability of man within that world. This part of the Homeric vision enabled Homer's heroes to sort out those things that they could do something about from those that they couldn't, and then to accept, with equanimity, the latter. Watching politicians who are every bit as powerful, arbitrary, and self-serving as the Greek gods, a large part of today's electorate is ready to distance themselves from that dangerous and demanding arena, to tend to their own flocks for whom they can build fences and over which they can exert some control<sup>54</sup>. This was the lesson that Paris had not learned as he foolishly tried to participate in the activities of the gods, bringing down destruction upon himself and the city of Troy.

This, then, is the ultimate test of any strategy, including the one before us: when all is said and done, when all the arguments have been heard, do we have confidence enough in our wisdom and judgment to accept the demands of this or any strategy as something we have the power to do? Or should we take no action, cultivating instead the dour patience needed to accept what comes through fate? Too often, the many voices from the past that shape our civic culture today only confuse us and threaten to delude us once again, and so we take the cautious course and do nothing, hoping that things won't get worse.

### **The Relevance of the Athenian Paradigm**

If we accept the validity of the Athenian paradigm, must we then predict the collapse of this strategy? More importantly, if the paradigm is valid, must we despair of ever bringing the American people together in a concentrated effort towards common but demanding goals?

Of course not. The existence of the Athenian paradigm merely entails that we

approach the challenges of transforming strategy into action with a more analytic sophistication. That's been done before: the framers of our Constitution unconsciously acted upon the demands of the paradigm (for it was part and parcel of the education many of them received at the height of the Enlightenment), and then Madison, Hamilton and Jay exploited its strengths and addressed its challenges through the wide-ranging arguments set forth in *The Federalist Papers*. The same recognition could be found in the multifaceted responses of Lincoln and Roosevelt to the challenges facing them: their strategies reveal a recognition of the complex of ideas in force within their civic cultures, and their shaping of our civic culture responds to the paradigm's demands. It everywhere shaped the words, ideas, and values they used to articulate their visions, to communicate their principles, and ultimately to focus their peoples' energies and talents on actions towards common goals.

But we too often are oblivious to the Athenian paradigm, and too often formulate strategy on the assumption that we are dealing with a homogeneous culture. A homogenous civic culture--such as that existing in Japan--simplifies the task of a strategic planner. A vision emerges more easily--almost naturally--from such a shared set of values, together with the principles that shape the actions required by such a strategy. And the members of that civic culture are predisposed to come together in support of that strategy, focusing their actions in support of that culturally defined agenda.

This is the weakness of the strategy formulations we have examined above. Marshall and Tucker are strong Platonists, assuming that the light they have seen outside the Cave will be immediately an object of desire, but they are oblivious to the demands of the Protagorean component of our civic culture and thus cannot come to terms with the failures they



document in the Rochester experiment. The approach recommended by the MIT Commission on Industrial Productivity and The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce derive their power from the rigor of their Aristotlean analysis, but their analysis nowhere addresses the conflicting Homeric visions documented by the Business-Higher Education Forum which militate against concerted action by the general population. President Bush and Ross Perot both are sensitive to the power emanating from the Protagorean strain and successfully exploit the idealism sanctioned by both Homeric excellence and Platonic idealism, but never answer the questions that Aristotle has taught us to ask.

Illuminated by the Athenian paradigm, this national strategy is seen to remain at risk. Its original appeal remains largely undimmed, reinforced as it is by its evocation of each of the strains in the paradigm. But the principles which define the details of its execution are not yet responsive to the challenges of the paradigm. Aristotlean analysis purports to show the natural path to such reforms, but our experience with such analyses raises questions about the viability of this course of action, questions that have not as yet been recognized or addressed by proponents of this strategy. The Platonic idealism implicit in this strategy has a well-established appeal, but its implicit elitism and concomitant skepticism further impede its implementation. Finally, the Homeric vision of "excellence" continues to shape our national identity, but the "personal responsibility" for achieving such excellence has been allowed to serve as an escape mechanism for those who are unwilling to pay the price this strategy demands.

The salvation of this strategy may lie in the paradigm's most often repudiated strain: the Protagorean. Platonic, Aristotlean and Homeric idealists have often joined together in

rejecting the pragmatism embodied in that strain, preferring to base their appeals instead upon their particular tradition's "higher good." Yet, in American civic culture, it has been the use of the consensus building techniques first promulgated by the Sophists that has proved most efficacious in translating ideals into concerted national action. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Gary Will's award-winning study of Lincoln's successful attempt at "a refounding of the nation, to correct things felt to be imperfect in the founders' own achievement" embodied in the Gettysburg Address<sup>55</sup>. An equivalent challenge faces those who would effect such radical change in American education today, but the resources are there for use in the Athenian paradigm, once they are seen, like all the other components of that paradigm, as more complementary than conflicting.

The Athenian paradigm demands that strategic planners recognize the multiple perspectives it provides on any strategic vision they would offer to the public. They must be sensitive to the innate appeals that drew them to that vision, and rigorously evaluate for themselves the validity of those appeals in the instance at hand, insuring that they themselves have not been seduced by them. They must be equally sensitive to the multiple interpretations--and the cultural traditions shaping those interpretations--that can be evoked by that vision. Some of those interpretations can be turned against them; others can be used to give additional strength to the vision they wish to communicate.

The same holds in formulating the principles from which concerted actions implementing the strategy are to follow. Given the Athenian paradigm, it can never be assumed that such principles are truly universal truths. Instead, as we have seen, they must be recognized as polyvalent assertions, and the strategic planner must carefully assess both

their potential to support and their potential to subvert the credibility of the strategy they would put forth as the structure for long term planning and collective action.

Most importantly, the strategic planner must never underestimate either the power or the validity of any of these sets of competing perspectives. It's tempting for a Platonic idealist to dismiss as specious carping the criticisms coming from Aristotlean analysts; it's equally tempting for Protagorean pragmatists to dismiss as vain ambition the pursuit of Homeric excellence. That may be morally satisfying, but it gets us nowhere.

Whatever we may forfeit in efficiency because we must work through this polyvalent Athenian paradigm, I suggest, we have always gained more in the unexcelled richness offered by this multiplicity of ideas and values. The Athenian paradigm has proved the power of syncretism, the ability to blend ideas together in new, more powerful, and more broadly acceptable combinations: the persistent power of Christianity or the continually growing appeal of that political process we call "democracy" only begin to suggest its power. To exploit that power, however, strategic planners must first recognize its complexity and then exert their analytical powers in focusing that richness to a common purpose.

With that perspective, we need not be so concerned about the conformity a dictum from Japan's MITI can educe. Instead, we can appreciate more the far greater power manifest in the impact of the Federalist Papers, only the first of many great American exemplifications of the thoughtful, comprehensive, and compelling employments of the Athenian paradigm.

## ENDNOTES

1. *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, 1991, p. 3.
2. *ibid.*, p.6
3. e.g., Robert B. Reich, writing in *The Work of Nations*, (New York: Vintage, 1992) and "The REAL Economy," *The Atlantic*, February, 1991, pp.35-52.
4. e.g., the Carnegie Forum on Education and The Economy, whose findings are synthesized in Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker, *Thinking for a Living*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992); The MIT Commission on Industrial Productivity, as reported in Michael L. Dertouzos, Richard K. Lester and Robert M. Solow, *Made in America: Regaining the Productive Edge*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990); and the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, in its report entitled *Americas's Choice: high skills or low wages!* (Rochester, NY: National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990). Later in the paper, a composite strategy for increasing productivity will be defined, based largely on the findings of these three studies, together with Reich's works and the statements of candidates in the 1992 presidential elections.
5. It can be argued that the U.S. has successfully undergone such behavioral transformations in the past, especially as it moved from a rural, agricultural society to today's urban and industrialized society. But such an analogy is flawed by three major differences:
  - \* that transformation was incremental and multi-generational, taking place over almost a century; in order to meet the challenges of today's global market, we must replicate an equally radical change within the decade if we are to have any hope of remaining competitive.
  - \* that transformation was an evolutionary process that occurred as people moved to the cities and engaged in industrial pursuits of their own volition, responding to economic imperatives rather than any governmental initiative; now, however, the economic challenge is perceived to be so intense that governmental intervention is deemed essential.
  - \* that transformation was characterized by increases in productivity in both the traditional agricultural sector and the emerging industrial arena; today, those who do not participate in such a transformational undertaking are threatened with the direst of impoverishment.

6. Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace and Victory: Strategy and Statecraft for the Next Century*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990) p.45. For a fuller understanding of the importance of culture as he defines it, this entire section, entitled "The Cultural Roots of Strategy" (pp.44-55) warrants study. See also his *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986) and *The Geopolitics of Super Power*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).
  
7. Michael Kammen's representative list of some twenty single- factor interpretations gives some sense of the range of possibilities. See his "Biformity: A Frame of Reference," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Contrapuntal Civilization: Essays towards a New Understanding of the American Experience*, ( New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971) pp. 3-4. More recently, Lieutenant Colonel Anita M. Arms, USAF, attempted to synthesize such factors into a description of the U.S. as a "complex social culture able to deal with inconsistency," See her *Strategic Culture: The American Mind*, unpublished essay, (Washington D.C.: The Industrial College of the Armed Forces, The National Defense University, 1991).
  
8. Kammen, op.cit., p. v. This collection of eighteen essays and its list of additional readings give substance to this view.
  
9. While Alan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* are central to this debate, I refer the reader to the indices of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in whose pages the debate is still raging. Alternatively, Robert Hughes' *Culture of Complaint: the fraying of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) offers an eminently readable perspective on that debate.
  
10. Victor H. Reis, "Refocused Science and Technology Supports U.S. Power Projection Needs," prepared statement to the Defense Subcommittee, House Appropriations Committee, March 19, 1992, reported in *Defense Issues*, Vol 7., No. 16, page 1.
  
11. The most recent comparison can be found in *The New York Times* for Sunday, February 14, 1992, p. A27, providing a comparison of average annual increases for the three countries since 1960. Throughout that period, the U.S. rate has been significantly lower than the other two countries.
  
12. *Made in America*, p.26.
  
13. William B. Johnston and Arnold E. Packer, *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century* (Indianapolis, IN: The Hudson Institute, 1987) p. xvii, 37ff.
  
14. See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) pp. 432-4 and passim; and Paul Krugman, *The Age of Diminished Expectations*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) pp. 10-13. It should be noted that these two authors do not leave this claim unchallenged, nor do they have any confidence themselves in the emerging strategy for competitiveness and productivity. Kennedy's most recent work, *Preparing for the 21st Century*, (New York: Random House, 1993) is pessimistic about the

efficacy of any national strategy.

15. *Made in America*, p. 81. This report has a host of recommendations for changes in labor and business practices to complement and reinforce this fundamental effort, but this single change is essential in itself, without which the others would be markedly less effective.

16. *Washington Post*, Thursday, February 18, 1993, pp. A24-A25, especially A24 columns 3, bottom, and 4, top.

17. As set forth in both the Department of Education publication *America 2000: An Education Strategy Sourcebook*, and the reports from the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, including *Learning for a Living* and *What Work Requires of Schools*.

18. "An America that Works," in *United We Stand: A Plan for the 21st Century* (Hyperion: New York, 1992) pp. 75-81.

19. e.g., The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, *America's Choice: high skills or low wages* (Rochester, NY: The National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990).

20. *United We Stand*, p. 79.

21. The unprecedented inclusiveness of this strategy is most evident in the 1990 report of the Governors' Education Task Force, a report produced under then-Governor Clinton and paralleled in President Bush's *America 2000: An Education Strategy*. Declaring that "we must invent a new education system," the report then went on to describe the features of such a system:

\*The system must be lifelong, recognizing that lifelong learning begins at birth, not at school, and continues throughout life, and does not end at graduation;

\*the system must focus on prevention, avoiding damage to young children and removing barriers to learning for all. ...;

\*The system must be performance-oriented, with an unwavering commitment to achieving results rather than to maintaining existing procedures, practices, or institutions;

\*The system must be flexible. Professionals should decide how best to help each individual achieve at high levels, rather than being told what to do and how to do it by distant authorities;

\*The systems and those who work in it must be accountable for the results they achieve. There must be real rewards for high performance and significant consequences for failure;

\*the system must attract and retain talented professionals and ensure that they receive continued support and professional development;

**\*the system must provide meaningful choices to students, parents, and adult learners by recognizing and accommodating their varying learning needs and skills.**

*Educating America: State Strategies for Achieving the National Education Goals (Report of the Task Force on Education)* (Washington, D.C.: The National Governors' Association, 1990), p.12.

22. There is a general consensus that employers will have to increase their investment in on-the-job training to levels at least equal to that of their international competitors, redistributing that investment across the workforce. Reich, in *The Work of Nations*, goes further, calling for a redistribution of higher corporate giving as well to support reforms in the primary and secondary school systems (p.280-1).

23. For example, note the disparate concerns expressed in *Made in America* and *The Work of Nations*.

24. Thucydides' purpose in writing his history is unequivocal: "It will be enough for me, however if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future" (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, I.24, tr. Rex Warner [London: Penguin Books, 1972] p.48). It is equally clear that, in Thucydides' view, both the democratic processes in Athens and the democratic impulses in Sparta were to blame for many if not all of the disasters he records.

25. Stripped of their later Roman and Christian interpretations, the individual behaviors of Homer's heroes --especially Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus--constitute a broad description of an ethic of arete, individual excellence. As this Homeric ethic is discussed at greater length below, reference will also be made to the equally popular and congruent work of Hesiod known as *The Works and Days*; that same poet's *Theogony* demonstrates the same ethic among the gods, and is even more evident when that latter work is contrasted to the Old Testament Genesis.

26. What remains of the Sophists' original writings is fragmentary at best, although there is virtual unanimity about their central role in first formulating and then disseminating the principles of persuasive discourse that would be accepted and augmented by later students of rhetoric. The remains of their reputation are even more fragmentary, for Plato (using every tool then in the Sophists' rhetorical inventory) attempted, with some success, to pillory Protagoras, their greatest spokesman, in his Socratic "dialogue" known today as "The Protagoras" when that sophist was, in all probability, no longer alive to defend himself. But because even Plato allows Protagoras to acquit himself to some degree and because what the Sophists taught is still the core of any legal education today, the sophists are a factor to reckon with, then and now.

27. Henry Nau, "The American Renaissance," *CEO / International Strategies*, (August/September 1992), pp. 18-21. See also his *The Myth of America's Decline* (Oxford: 1992).
28. *Service Sector Productivity* (Washington, D.C.: McKinsey Global Institute, 1992)
29. *The Age of Diminished Expectations*, pp. 16-17.
30. The decade-long disputes over the validity of the Scholastic Aptitude Test suggest the dimensions of the debate; the history of standardized testing in Texas, initiated by a commission headed by Mr. Perot, provides further illustrations of the empirical and political problems posed by such an enterprise.
31. See the summary of test results in "America on the Precipice," *Thinking for A Living*, Chapter 5, pp.63-75.
32. This is set forth most fully in his *Democracy and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916). For a fuller analysis of Dewey's educational philosophy, see Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
33. One of the seminal documents in the evolution of this strategy, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986) prepared by the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession focused only on reforms within the schools.
34. *Thinking for a Living*, pp. 112-24.
35. Marshall and Tucker leave their consideration of this example with their optimism intact --"A concerted effort would have to be made both to engage parents and other community members in the reform program more deeply and to develop a more sophisticated strategy for communicating the board's goals and programs to the public" (pp.123-24).
36. Such as Albert T. Sommers and Lucie Blau, *The U.S. Economy Demystified: The Meaning of U.S. Business Statistics and What They Portend for the Future* (New York: Lexington Books, 1993), as abstracted in "The U.S. Economy: A New American 'Normal'," *Across the Board* (December 1992) pp. 27-31.
37. *Thinking for a Living*, pp. 3-27.
38. "America's Education Goals," *America 2000: An Education Strategy*, p. 19.
39. John Immerwahr, Jean Johnson, and Adam Kernan-Schloss, *Cross Talk: The Public, the Experts, and Competitiveness* (Washington D.C.: The Business-Higher Education Forum, 1991).



40. "The Moral Fix," *Cross Talk*, pp. 11-12.
41. "Legacy of the Great Society," *Cross Talk*, pp.15-16; and, more recently, "Social Investment Programs: Comparing the Past with the Promised Payoff," *The New York Times* (March 2, 1993) p. A18.
42. Samuel P. Huntington, "The U.S. -- Decline or Renewal," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 88/89, Vol 67, No. 2, pp. 76-96. This group of "declinists" includes Kennedy, Krugman, and others.
43. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp 333-35.
44. *The Work of Nations*, pp. 247-9.
45. *Cross Talk*, p. 13.
46. For a wide-ranging critical treatment of our testing practices, see F. Allan Hanson, *Testing Testing: Social Consequences of the Examined Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
47. "Remarks by the President," *America 2000: An Education Strategy*, p. 4.
48. *Thinking for a Living*, p. 83.
49. A summary of these differences as set out in the section headings in *Cross Talk* is illuminating:
  - (1) The public and leadership have entirely different pictures of how the economy works and what steps will produce the economic prosperity will produce the economic prosperity both groups desire.
  - (2) The public does not see the trade gap--the most potent symbol of declining U.S. competitiveness--as anything new or especially alarming.
  - (3) More immediate and concrete problems are always on the top of the public's agenda.
  - (4) The public's attention is deflected by emotionally charged side issues--the symptoms and side-effects of the country's lagging economic competitiveness.
  - (5) Much of the public believes our competitiveness problems begin and end with Japan.
  - (6) When the public thinks about the problems in the work force--and the problems of students who will enter the work force of the future--they focus almost exclusively on "moral" aspects of the issue. They believe attitudes and motivation, not skills or training, are the cause of the problem--and the cure.
  - (7) Because the public believes the problem is a question of will and effort, they believe America can "bounce right back"--if and when it decides to.
  - (8) The public believes that basic skills are enough. They do not understand

that the 21st-century work force will need new, advanced skills.

(9) The public believes that the only change required to prepare a competitive American work force is to improve the learning that goes on in grade school, middle school, and high school.

(10) The public often resists policies for upgrading skills because they do not think there will be enough jobs for people who improve their skills.

(11) The public is ambivalent about policies to upgrade education or improve the skills of workers if they seem to require massive government spending on programs for the disadvantaged.

(12) The public has mixed feelings about technology. For some technology is a problem, not a cure. Others just cannot imagine that we need more technology than we already have.

50. *Cross Talk*, p. 19.

51. *The Culture of Contentment* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

52. *Boiling Point: Democrats, Republicans, and the Decline of Middle-Class Prosperity* (New York: Random House, 1993).

53. *The Pentagonists: An Insider's View of Waste, Mismanagement, and Fraud in Defense Spending* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

54. John Kenneth puts on this Hesiodic guise as he begins the concluding chapter of *The Culture of Contentment* (entitled "Requiem"):

Books of this genre are expected have a happy ending. With awareness of what is wrong, the corrective forces of democracy are set in motion. And perhaps they would be now were they in a full democracy—one that embraced the interests and votes of all the citizens. Those now outside the contented majority would rally, or, more precisely, could be rallied, to their own interest and therewith to the larger and safer public. Alas, however, we speak here of a democracy of those with the least sense of urgency to correct what is wrong, the best insulation through short-run comfort from what could go wrong. p. 174.

55. *Lincoln at Gettysburg: the words that remade America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) p. 39. Reaffirming Lincoln's idealism (long under challenge by modern historians), Will shows how Lincoln learned to acknowledge the presuppositions and prejudices of his constituents, and then how he used the approaches first systematized by Protagoras to build a new consensus around those ideals that had always remained pivotal in his thinking. As Wills described what Lincoln accomplished at Gettysburg,

Both North and South strove to win the battle for *interpreting* Gettysburg as soon as the physical battle had ended. Lincoln is after even larger game—he

means to "win" the whole Civil War in ideological terms as well as military ones. And he will succeed: the Civil War *is*, to most Americans, what Lincoln wanted it to *mean*. Words had to complete the work of guns.

Lincoln is here not only to sweeten the air of Gettysburg, but to clear the infected atmosphere of American history itself, tainted with official sins and inherited guilt. He would cleanse the Constitution--not, as William Lloyd Garrison had, by burning an instrument that countenanced slavery. He altered the document from within, by appeal from its letter to its spirit, subtly changing the recalcitrant stuff of that legal compromise, bringing it to its own indictment. By implicitly doing this, he performed one of the most daring acts of open-air sleight-of-hand ever witnessed by the unsuspecting. Everyone in that vast throng was having his or her intellectual pocket picked. The crowd departed with a new thing in its ideological luggage, that new constitution Lincoln had substituted for the one they had brought there with them. They walked off, from those curving graves on the hillside, under a changed sky, into a different America. Lincoln had revolutionized the Revolution, giving people a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely.

(pp37-8)

## **APPENDIX A**

### **The Pertinent Points of the Paradigm**

The Greek writers whose ideas are embodied in the Athenian paradigm have bequeathed to us a substantive body of works. Further, over the last two thousand years, their students have proceeded to fill libraries with specialized commentary on the teachings of these masters.

After twenty years of study, I'm still grappling with the texts of Homer, Plato, Aristotle and the Protagorean Sophists. Every time I open one of their works, I find something new or challenging, something that illuminates still more the persistent power of these writers in our contemporary civic culture.

But my perspective is somewhat unique: I am not a philosopher as the term is used in today's universities, nor am I truly a historian by traditional standards. Thus my perspective on these authors is somewhat idiosyncratic as I use the ideas embodied in these four figures to illuminate contemporary civic culture.

For that reason, it may be useful to review what I believe to be the contributions of each of these figures to our civic culture. That review will focus on those seminal ideas which bear most directly upon the analysis of the strategy to hand. And since it is not my purpose to argue with professional philosophers about minutiae, my description of those seminal ideas will be more comprehensive than detailed, although I stand always ready to defend, point by point, any generalizations offered here.

#### **Homer**

While Virgil's retelling of the Trojan story focuses on the heroic destiny of Aeneas, Rome's founder, Homer's epic celebrates "the wrath of Achilles." To modern readers who follow the story closely, that is indeed a troubling theme, for Achilles never acts as others advise or demand, never deferring to the rational arguments put forth by either Menelaus, Nestor, or his own mother. He is never prudent, and ultimately willingly forfeits his own immortality by avenging Patroclus' death, itself an act that springs more from Achilles himself than from any rational decision.

And the other heroes in the Iliad are no different. Hector, Troy's great defender, is similarly irrational. Secure behind the impregnable walls of Troy, responsible, as Priam's son, for the defense of Troy itself and, as husband and father, for the safety of his wife

Andromache and their infant son, he chooses, for his own reasons, to go outside those sturdy walls and meet Achilles, whom he knows will defeat him and thus set the stage for the fall of Troy.

The "wily Ulysses" is indistinguishable from Achilles and Hector in that his actions too appear to have no coherence, no overarching vision. Rather, he does whatever seems to be most efficacious at any given moment--and, significantly, is proved right every time--even though it may be either wrong-headed or deadly to anyone and everyone else around him.

But the very disparate behaviors of these heroes is coherent in the mind of Homer, for they share one preeminent feature: all that each of these heroes do is focused by who they are, by the set of attributes given to them at birth--their nature-- and what that nature demands of them. Achilles is the most wrathful, and his utter and complete wrathfulness is his particular excellence; similarly, Hector's princeliness and Ulysses' wiliness are their particular and essential natures, and they are heroes because they are second to none in living out and actualizing their individual natures. They are as excellent as they can be within the nature that has been given to them, and that is all that Homer or his contemporaries can expect of a hero: arete, or excellence.

Homer's excellence is significantly different from that which would later be espoused by both Plato and Aristotle. These later philosophers would see excellence defined by the superior qualities of a member of a group. Homer's heroes, however, are each uniquely excellent; there is no standard or norm for their idiosyncratic excellence other than that inherent in their capacity for that particular excellence. Thus Homer's heroes were obliged to shape their own heroism by acting in fullest accord with their nature, regardless of the behaviors, capacities, or norms manifest in those around them. Both precedent and posterity were irrelevant: what was heroic was accepting the challenge of their unique destinies, striving to meet that destiny wherever it took them and whatever it demanded of them. Homer's heroes were, in short, individuals in the fullest possible sense.<sup>1</sup>

Homer's successors would blunt the uniqueness of the heroic individual as they sought for the "universals" that provided the underlying order to the world. Plato and Aristotle would both define a universal model of behavior whose standards applied to all, but both would retain the Homeric vision of an individual's unique responsibility. Both would go beyond Homer to insist that an individual's fundamental responsibility was to know the truth, but then, like Homer, they too insisted that the individual act upon that knowledge, and that in acting alone could virtue be found. Eventually, the individual's fundamental responsibility for his own actions would surface as the essential ingredient in the process of Christian salvation.

Striving to meet one's heroic destiny was one part of the Homeric vision; the other side was confronting the strife that was the essence of the cosmos and manifest in the relationship among the Olympians themselves from their very conception. In such a cosmos the stratagems of Menelaus, Nestor, and the very gods themselves were eventually destined

for eventual failure by forces beyond their personal control. Thus the Homeric vision thus counseled the acceptance of inevitable death and defeat; even the gods themselves could have no confidence in their own immortality.

Homer and his contemporaries lived in a world where what we still acknowledge in our lives today as Murphy's Law--whatever can go wrong, will--was the only constant they could recognize in their lives, one that was as true for their gods as it was for them. In the *Iliad*, nothing ever works out as anyone had planned; the end is always worse than anyone had envisioned. Even Zeus, the holder of lightning and the most powerful of the Olympians, has to make constant adjustments in his plans for the Greeks and Trojans to accommodate the unpredictable and uncontrollable interference from Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite.

This dark side of the Homeric vision would eventually be obscured by the growing optimism engendered by the vision of an ordered, purposeful world emerging in the thought of Plato and Aristotle. But it would persist in Greek thought, giving form and substance to the teachings of the Epicureans and Stoics, both of whom continued to believe that randomness, and not order, was the organizing principle of the cosmos and shaped their ethics to accommodate that randomness. They, in their turn, would be followed by Christian theologians who, for all of their optimism, joined their precursors in describing this "fallen world" as the domain of the fickle Lady Fortune, with Divine Providence and its eternal order manifesting itself only outside of time. Thus, Homer's contemporaries would recognize as their own the prayer of St. Francis: "Give me the power to change the things I can, the patience to accept the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference."

### **Protagoras and the Sophists**

Little remains of the writings of Protagoras and his fellow Sophists. What we know of them is vividly colored by the criticisms of Plato, Aristotle, and their descendants; it is noteworthy that such criticisms founded on the Platonic and Aristotelean claims to have found a path to truth, a claim never made by the Sophists. Thus the kindest thing that is said about the Sophists is that their nearest parallel is to be found today in "the numerous institutions ... which advertise their ability to train people for success in business, or in life in general." Their teachings are characterized as always "having a relation to the art of getting on, or of success in life." Even the greatest of the Sophists, Protagoras, is dismissively characterized as claiming "to teach virtue, which was almost equivalent to efficiency in the conduct of life."<sup>2</sup> In our civic culture, "sophistry" is never anything but a pejorative.

Yet the Sophists and their teachings advanced the cause of 5th century Athens. for that city was not homogeneous, but rather a fragile amalgamation of numerous families and tribes clustered together in the various neighborhoods of the city. Unified action was possible only through the vote of the *Ekklesia* or council representing the varied interests of those groups. Such a vote itself was no simple matter: The membership of the *Ekklesia* in peacetime, Thucydides reports, could number well over 5,000<sup>3</sup>. Protagoras and the Sophists,

however, found ways to make this assembly work. They first observed carefully the verbal behaviors manifest in that assembly and across the spectrum of Athenian life, mirroring the empiricism that was being practiced by the mathematicians and naturalists of the time. From those observations, they identified the range of techniques employed by those who successfully conjoined their interests with those of others by persuasion and thus elicited cooperation from their listeners. The Sophists then offered what they had learned to other citizens of Athens for their employment in public deliberations where they could be used to great effect. At the same time, it should be noted, they made fortunes for themselves: that may have been an index of the value they offered Athenian society, but it also became the focus of much resentment from their critics.

This was no little achievement: one has only to observe the always ineffectual councils of the Homeric Greeks as they were recorded in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to see how fruitless, counterproductive, and pernicious such processes had proven to be in that older culture, lacking as it did the insights and disciplines the Sophists were to offer the later Athenians.

What the Sophists offered, and what we have inherited today, is first of all their recognition of the acute importance of the public whom they were addressing and their *a priori* values and assumptions. The starting point for a Homeric speech is the speaker's own desires; for the Sophists, the starting point was to be the common desires of those to whom the speech was directed. They stressed the necessity and the utility of articulating the "common sense" of the people (who may never have articulated it for themselves) before they attempted to argue for any course of action. They identified empirically the ways in which that opinion could then be mobilized and directed effectively towards a common goal, thus empowering those with such skills to mobilize the people effectively.

Pericles' Funeral Oration (and its countless imitators over the succeeding generations) concretely demonstrates the unifying power that the Sophists' rhetoric could wield. What is often overlooked in that speech, however, is the expression of this central Sophistic insight into the nature of civic discourse itself: "I expected this outbreak of anger on your part against me," Pericles says to the Athenians dismayed by two successive Spartan invasions and anxious to sue for peace,

since I understand the reasons for it; and I have called an assembly...to remind you of your previous resolutions and to put forward my own case against you, if we find that there is anything unreasonable in your anger against me and in your giving way to your misfortunes. My own opinion is that when the whole state is on the right course it is a better thing for each separate individual than when the state as a whole is going downhill. However well off a man may be in his private life, he will still be involved in the general ruin if his country is destroyed; whereas, so long as the state itself is secure, individuals have a much greater chance of recovering from their private misfortunes. Therefore, since a state can support individuals in their suffering, but no one person by

himself can bear the load that rests upon the state, is it not right for us all to rally to her defense? Is it not wrong to act as you are doing now?"

For modern readers, the sentiment in this passage is so unremarkable that many editors omit it in modern anthologies. The Sophistic insight Pericles exhibits is apparent only when this speech and its consequences are compared to either the Homeric councils or the equally futile though eminently reasonable arguments of the Spartan king Archidamus "who had a reputation for both intelligence and moderation."<sup>5</sup>

Successfully employing Sophistic principles in recognizing and legitimizing his listeners' concerns, Pericles persuades the Athenians to follow him along the course he is pursuing and to which they were angrily opposed. That, of course, was in itself more than his Homeric predecessors could accomplish through words and thus marks the practical consequences of Sophistic teachings.

But what is even more indicative of the Sophists' contribution to Western civic culture is in the definition of a "nation" set forth in this speech, a concept now defined by that same commonality of interest which is as the core of Sophistic rhetoric. Before the Sophists, allegiance was fixed by blood or oath, or extracted by conquest. As evidenced by this portion of Pericles' speech, the Sophists laid the groundwork for a powerfully persuasive new vision of a nation, an entity that transcended individual interests and yet was essential to the successful realization of those interests. Protagoras and the Sophists, I suggest, gave our civic culture both such a vision and an understanding of the communication processes needed to share that vision effectively. It is the Sophists who give both meaning and force to the challenge "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," a challenge that would have been meaningless before their advent.

Protagoras and his successors made another major contribution to civic culture in the West. As empirical investigators of the means by which consensus could be elicited by a speaker from among his listeners, the Sophists, over time, generated a comprehensive body of proven lore. The contents of this compendium ranged from the most minute elements--the relationships between the vowel and the consonants in a single sounds of a syllable or the gesture of a single finger--to the largest structural elements embracing a whole set of speeches to a common end. Their empirical method, which continually tested this body of lore in the field, as it were, of political discourse, insured that only those techniques that proved to work would be retained and passed down to subsequent generations. As tastes changed and new ideas were introduced, that same field-testing served to validate new entries into that compendium; at the same time, those rendered no longer useful by changing fashions were abandoned.

This 2000 year old process of investigation continues unabated today, creating a unique standard for our civic discourse: while other cultures place a premium on public speech that conforms to a standard of style, Western civic culture values that which is effective in persuading others to the ends of the speaker, speech which builds the "intended



consensus."<sup>6</sup> Ronald Reagan was celebrated as a "great communicator" not because of any inherent intellectual substance or necessary internal coherence or any superior polish in the delivery of his ideas<sup>7</sup>: he demonstrated his claim by the total impact he had on those who listened to him, his ability to elicit consensus from a substantial and heterogeneous part of his audience. Only neo-Platonists or neo-Aristotleans would believe that "vision" or "coherence" or "evident truth" were sufficient for effective communication; Protagoras and his successors, working at a more empirical and behavioral level, discovered differently in 5th century Athens.

## **Plato**

Plato, followed by Christian theologians, gave us a new sense of individual potential, a potential that was virtually unlimited and yet realizable through more intense individual effort. His "lover of wisdom" was no ivory-tower academic; rather, like the Socrates Plato depicts in his writings, this lover of wisdom was active in the world, looking at it with a critical eye but always anxious to pursue excellence wherever it was observed, seizing upon it and exploiting it to progressively greater effect. Plato reviled those who were content to stay in his allegorical cave of convention, where the comfortable illusions created by the shadows on the wall were preferable to the risks inherent in going out into the sunlight. He celebrated those who would take that risk, promising those who aggressively pursued excellence a new level of understanding and mastery. And this process of amelioration was explicitly open-ended: there was, in Plato's vision, always more to be discovered, more to be learned, and more to be used. Plato, in short, instilled in our civic culture the belief that the "best" can always be made "better," that more rigorous investigation will always produce more knowledge, and that more knowledge will further empower us.

That pursuit of excellence, however, required a different stance towards the process of discovery and the nature of knowledge. Plato's favorite targets, the Sophists, had offered a body of lore to their students and were content if those students mastered that lore and employed it just as their masters had done in their time. Plato took them to task again and again in his dialogues for the inadequacies of such an approach. In its place, he argued that the pursuit of excellence required an individual who was never content with what was thought to be known, but always open to the possibility of new knowledge, new approaches to the truth, and new ways of doing things that would constitute an improvement on the old. The "traditional" way of doing things was only a starting place for those who would pursue true excellence.

Finally, the pursuit of excellence, according to Plato, required the constant use of the critical intelligence to challenge the assertions put forth by others as "lore" or "truth." Plato would have no statement go unchallenged, no claim go untested, no proof ever taken as final. As Plato depicts him, Socrates was the first great contrarian, and that contrariness was what gave him his special efficacy in the pursuit of excellence. In Socrates' death, Plato

acknowledges the disruption that such contrariness will engender, but for him the constant challenging of received information is the only means by which the individual will be able to move further along the path to true and more effective and usable knowledge, an end to which mankind alone is naturally drawn.

## Aristotle

Aristotle imposed order on a world many of his contemporaries believed to be essentially random, formulating a model of causality that shapes our understanding of the physical world and our expectation that a similar order exists in the social sphere. From that expectation comes the idea of strategy, the deliberate employment of appropriate causes to produce an expected outcome. Integral to that model of causality was a taxonomic methodology which proved equally useful in analyzing the physical world and came to have equal force in analyzing social phenomena.

Aristotle stood apart from his predecessors. Homer, Hesiod, and Epicurus had all held that events were essentially random and that mankind must learn to live with that randomness. Plato believed that there was a uniative order in the universe, but he argued that any such order was ultimately beyond our full appreciation. Aristotle, however, argued that, rightly understood, the nature of things was comprehensible and thus offered the promise of control through such knowledge. Aristotle's thought is based upon the premise that there was a regularity in nature akin to that found by Pythagoras and others in mathematics.

Aristotle found such an order by considering the similarities and differences observable in the world around him. While observable differences obviously distinguished between things, their similarities suggested that they had something in common. Pursuing that line of thought, Aristotle eventually postulates that similar things share a similar nature insofar as they are similar, and the essential similarity is to be sought in the way various things come into existence and go out of existence. Insofar as they come into and go out of existence in the same way, they share the same nature.

This sounds like a simple-minded form of analysis, but it led Aristotle to a system of taxonomy that dominates our biological and physical sciences. Tomatoes, for example, are technically classified as "fruit" rather than "vegetable" because of the processes by which their seeds are formed and propagated; in like fashion, the monster bacterium *Epulopiscium fishelsoni* was misclassified until its physical processes were examined more closely. Finally, this analytic model gives us confidence in the various types of simulations being developed today, along with our much older use of other forms of argument "from analogy."

It is important to note that Aristotle applied the same principles of analysis to humankind, insisting upon "natural" distinctions between not only men and women, but between social classes, each of which had a natural role to play in the larger society. To

aspire to functions outside that naturally defined set of functions was to be "unnatural."

This definition of the nature of individuals and groups led Aristotle to establish a method for looking at the processes by which things regularly (literally, "by rule") come to be in order to understand those processes rightly so that accurate distinction between things of different natures could be drawn. He identified four critical components of a process (which he called, to the consternation of generations of students, the "four causes"):

- \*the natural, consistent, and inevitable outcome of a process (the final cause);
- \*the essential material components of that process (the material cause);
- \*the arrangement of such materials necessary to produce the outcome (the formal cause); and
- \*the events or actions that must occur to those materials so arranged if the outcome is to occur (the efficient cause).

Insofar as two things were similar in each of these four aspects, they shared a similar nature.

But the understanding produced by such analysis had even more promise. The mathematicians had already grasped the principle that, once the "nature" of a triangle was understood, new triangles could be created with the same properties. Aristotle's definition of "natures" did the same thing for the physical world. Once the four "causes" in a natural process were accurately identified, then they could be manipulated towards specific ends.

We see this mode of analysis most explicitly in the subdivisions of engineering: design engineers are concerned with final causes, defining the problem in terms of the nature of the thing that must be produced; systems engineers work with formal causes, identifying the essential "form" that the system's components must take in order to produce the end effect. Materials engineers are concerned with the physical properties of the essential elements within the process, while production engineers are primarily concerned about how the end product, shaped to the purposes of the designers and incorporating the system design and critical materials identified by their colleagues, actually comes into being.

Aristotle himself then applied the same principles he observed in physical phenomena to social phenomena. By analyzing social organizations and their constituent elements and rightly understanding the causative elements defining their nature, they could be improved or changed. This was the promise, as yet still unfulfilled in detail, that Aristotle offered to his successors, one that gives rise to our confidence in both our physical sciences and our social strategies.

## ENDNOTES

1. Richard Slotkin's just-completed trilogy--*Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1993)--details the centrality and the permutations of this Homeric strain in the larger culture of America.
2. N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) p. 1000.
3. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 8.72, p.579.
4. As recollected by Thucydides (himself a Sophist) in his *History*, 2.59, p.158-9. The entire speech is to be found in 2:59-64, pp. 158-163.
5. Thucydides' *History*, 1.80-85, pp. 82-86.
6. Read from this perspective, Shintaro Ishihara's *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals* tr. Frank Baldwin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) offers a classic study of two cultures which approach public discourse from two utterly disparate perspectives, promoting rather than mitigating conflict between them.
7. In an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* for February 25, 1993, the general editor of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, Professor Justin Kaplan, was taken to task for depriving Mr. Reagan of adequate representation in the most recent edition of that sourcebook. His response in the same paper for March 25, 1993, entitled "Reagan Boosters, Go Ahead and Make My Day" illuminates this issue further.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **From Athens To America: The Survival Of The Paradigm**

This Athenian paradigm, I suggest, holds for Western civic culture in the twentieth century, but before I can demonstrate its applicability and utility in assessing contemporary strategies for regaining industrial competitiveness, I may have to describe the process by which that paradigm was able to persist to our own day and, with concrete examples, show how it continues to shape the form and the substance of our civic debates today.

#### **The persistence of the Athenian paradigm**

The case for the persistence of this paradigm is patently simple: during the two millennia between Periclean Athens and the Constitutional Convention, these four options would be preserved by their own inherent appeal, reinforced by their advocates' status as "authorities" in Western thought.

The Homeric vision of the self-affirming hero will be tinged with destiny in Virgil and divinity in exegeses of the New Testament but it will retain its fundamental power and meaning for use in a campaign to elect a candidate whose unique successes as a businessman were his greatest virtue. The "dark side" of this vision, articulated by a pessimistic Hesiod in his dourly pragmatic *Works and Days*, emphasizes the need to cope with the vicissitudes of chaotic fortune, a vision that will be echoed by the Epicureans and the Stoics and then assimilated into Christianity through Boethius and others who counsel Christian "patience."

The analytic study and use of persuasion initiated by Protagoras and the Sophists would be preserved as a formal and central part of professional schooling from that day forward, augmented by the practical discoveries of countless practitioners from the Grecian tutors hired to train Roman lawyers to today's spin-doctors. Their more significant contribution--their insistence upon consensus as the highest good--will persist in republican Rome and be an operative fact for any medieval king, as John was forced to acknowledge in the *Magna Carta*. In its turn, it will shape both the operations of our own Constitutional Convention and the arguments in *The Federalist Papers* that gained acceptance for that document.

The survival of Plato's idealism is most immediately apparent in Cicero's eloquent defense of an ideal Roman republic in the face of the Homeric Julius Caesar, but it is canonized in Western culture when Augustine of Hippo uses it to articulate a theology for what had been just another Roman mystery religion among many, and then is reinforced in virtually every sermon for the next 1500 years. Aristotle's analytic rigor is first enlisted in that same theological enterprise, where its tools of logic and taxonomy are further developed by the Scholastic theologians to prescribe and proscribe human behavior in this less-than-

ideal world so that humanity could eventually enjoy the ideal in the next. Then, as the Enlightenment came to reject the metaphysics of theology and to focus instead on the empirical world, Aristotle's promise, first visible to some Athenians, was restored as it produced replicable insights into the inherent order of the physical world and its processes to Bacon and his successors. To Enlightenment thinkers, Aristotle also appeared to promise equally universal insights into the behaviors of individuals and groups, revealing an inherent order through the Aristotelean science of politics.

### **The preservation of the Athenian paradigm**

The historic path of the Athenian paradigm to the our own civic culture outlined here is, I think, quite clearly definable, though volumes could be written on the details of that process. What is often overlooked, however, is the means by which that civic culture was preserved in a non-print culture.

Homer's works, scholars generally agree, were oral-formulaic in their composition, a technique which facilitated memorization and recitation, the only means of transmission possible in a pre-literate culture. Building on that mnemonic technique, one of the first contributions of Sophistic rhetoricians was the identification and exploitation of rhetorical core appeals, called *topoi*<sup>1</sup>, that were proved invariably to produce a predictable response in a given audience and which work equally well in Pericles' Funeral Oration, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, or President Bush's opening of Desert Storm hostilities. As Platonic and Aristotelean ideas permeated Athenian and later civic cultures, they were incorporated into the growing body of *topoi*, thus becoming available to anyone sufficiently schooled in them and their use for employment to any end they might choose in civic discourse. The memorization of and experimentation with such an ever-expanding body of *topoi* was the central task of any student aspiring to take his place in the civic culture of republican or imperial Rome or, later the civic cultures of Church and state in medieval Europe.

When, in the Middle Ages, the mnemonically transmitted collections of such *topoi* reached the monasteries and their scriptoria, their preservation and dissemination was further augmented by manuscript collections for transmission to future generations in the form of *florilegia* (of which *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* is a direct though somewhat enfeebled descendant, still used to the same ends by high school debaters). Thus the core sentiments of each element in Athenian culture were preserved and promulgated without a break for more than two thousand years.

But what is especially important about this mode of preservation and transmission is its reduction of complex ideological structures into their component fragments, coupled with the license every individual (then and now) has to recombine those fragments into an argumentative structure towards any end desired. Further, *topoi* could stand alone, encapsulating an entire argument whose established appeal was so well ingrained in this continuum of civic culture that its supporting evidence need not be presented.

In short, no one, then or now, has ever needed to read Homer or Plato or Aristotle--much less consider the consequences of each of their competing value systems--to use effectively the values advanced by each of those Greeks in civic debates about strategy and to benefit from their established authority. The competing values of Homer, Protagoras, Plato and Aristotle have, I maintain, acquired the status of what the social psychologist Rogelio Diaz-Guerrero calls "socio-cultural premisses"<sup>2</sup> as they continue to be employed throughout our contemporary civic culture with great purposefulness and without much apparent sense of contradiction or inconsistency. We are comfortable with them, at least until they pinch and require that we act in ways that are discomfiting.

### **The Power of the Athenian Paradigm in a Slogan...**

The Athenian paradigm, I suggest, makes public appeals for action successful in our civic culture. To illustrate the centrality and power of this paradigm, we need only look briefly at two examples, the first of which is the Army's very successful recruiting slogan "Be all you can be."

"Be all you can be" is an exemplary American slogan, the kind beloved of both advertising copywriters and media reporters looking for a soundbite. But its real power lies in the multiple interpretations that it is given through the Athenian paradigm. Aimed at high-school graduates, this slogan appeals to the sense of the heroic that has persisted since the time of Homer, challenging each individual to achieve his or her particular excellence, to put forth extraordinary efforts and thus achieve extraordinary distinction.

This slogan, however, appeals to their parents more through its Platonic idealism. Like Andromache, they are concerned about the risks their offspring will incur if they enlist. But such fears are countered by the Platonic promise they find in this slogan. They focus on the process that will make their child all he or she can be. They are swayed by the Platonic promise that military service will offer their child unique opportunities for individual growth and learning. They look to the structured experiences, the social, mental and physical disciplines of military training, that will enable their offspring to achieve their full potential. They may not know that Plato himself was the first to describe such a regimen as the path to true citizenship, but that path is now so central to our culture that they trust in its validity without examining it in detail.

But the Army's real promise is limited by its Aristotlean understanding of the limits on the potential of each individual. This is, after all, a recruiting campaign intended primarily to fill the junior enlisted ranks: while the path to the highest ranks is not closed to anyone, few will naturally progress that far, with the rest, while reaching their individual potential, will fill out and find contentment in the lesser ranks appropriate to their nature.

Finally, an all-volunteer military is itself a consequence of a Protagorean sensibility, a confidence that the members of this civic culture will respond in sufficient numbers to the

patriotic challenge, either by voluntarily enlisting or by accepting the higher costs of such an all-volunteer force. This slogan is an effective Protagorean exhortation to consensus: it calls upon volunteers to make a personal contribution to the nation, and celebrates, for the population at large, the unique excellences of our volunteer military, composed as it is of individuals who are committed to "being all they can be."

### **...And in a speech**

As the first aircraft headed towards Iraq on the evening of January 16, 1991, President Bush addressed the nation. That speech unified, at least momentarily, the nation in the pursuit of the national strategy embodied in Operation Desert Shield as it was transformed into Operation Desert Storm. While this speech may not be memorized by future schoolchildren, it represents, in its appeals to the various strains of the Athenian paradigm, how that paradigm has helped to focus the populace's energies and talents, motivating them towards a common though problematic goal.

While many of us can remember the impact of that speech, the details may have faded from memory. And because the strains of the Athenian paradigm are intertwined in this speech, it is worthwhile to examine it in toto, as reported in the *Chicago Tribune*, supplemented with bracketed commentary which highlights the elements of the paradigm as they surface.

Through such commentary, I hope to suggest more concretely how the Athenian paradigm, for all of its antiquity and transparency, remains a persistent and prominent feature of our civic discourse, one which must be considered in the development of any future strategy.

### **BUSH: KUWAIT WILL BE FREE**

*The Chicago Tribune*

Thursday, January 17, 1991

The following is a complete transcript of President Bush's address Wednesday night [January 16]:

Five months ago, Saddam Hussein started this cruel war against Kuwait; tonight the battle has been joined.

[This is a Homeric opening, an echo of Hector exercising responsibility for the defense of Troy, accepting the fate thrust upon him.]

This military action, taken in accord with United Nations resolutions and with the consent of the U.S. Congress, follows months of constant and virtually



endless diplomatic activity on the part of the United Nations, the United States and many, many other countries.

Arab leaders sought what became known as an Arab solution, only to conclude that Saddam Hussein was unwilling to leave Kuwait. Others traveled to Baghdad in a variety of efforts to restore peace and justice. Our secretary of state, James Baker, held an historic meeting in Geneva, only to be totally rebuffed.

This past weekend, in a last-ditch effort, the secretary general of the United Nations (Javier Perez de Cuellar) went to the Middle East with peace in his heart - his second such mission - and he came back from Baghdad with no progress at all in getting Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait.

Now the 28 countries with forces in the gulf area, having exhausted all reasonable efforts to reach a peaceful resolution, have no choice but to drive Saddam from Kuwait by force.

[This brief history of events is everywhere shaped by the Protagorean desire for consensus: it documents the efforts of various parties to establish some satisfactory consensus with Hussein; in the process, it demonstrates concretely the considerable consensus that exists among the Allies. That consensus from coalition members was, in the opinion of American strategists, much more vital than any concrete contributions the individual coalition members might make to the war. Thus it is this consensus that makes possible, in part, the claim that is to follow.]

We will not fail.

As I report to you, air attacks are under way against military targets in Iraq. We are determined to knock out Saddam Hussein's nuclear bomb potential. We will also destroy his chemical weapons facilities. Much of Saddam's artillery and tanks will be destroyed.

Our operations are designed to best protect the lives of all the coalition forces by targeting Saddam's vast military arsenal.

Initial reports from Gen. (H. Norman) Schwarzkopf are that our operations are proceeding according to plan.

Our objectives are clear. Saddam Hussein's forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free.

**Iraq will eventually comply with all relevant UN resolutions and then, when peace is restored, it is our hope that Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the family of nations, thus enhancing the security and stability of the gulf.**

**[This is the Aristotlean strategy: a vision of a restored natural order, achieved by precisely defined steps taken in precisely defined arenas. It is, I think, worth noting that while its objectives were achieved, this strategy has eventually proved to be emotionally unsatisfying, for reasons explainable in terms of other strains in the paradigm, to significant segments of the American public over the intervening months since its successful conclusion.]**

**Some may ask, "Why act now? Why not wait?" The answer is clear. The world could wait no longer.**

**Sanctions, though having some effect, showed no signs of accomplishing their objective. Sanctions were tried for well over five months and we and our allies concluded that sanctions alone would not force Saddam from Kuwait.**

**While the world waited, Saddam Hussein systematically raped, pillaged and plundered a tiny nation - no threat to his own. He subjected the people of Kuwait to unspeakable atrocities, and among those maimed and murdered - innocent children. While the world waited, Saddam sought to add to the chemical weapons arsenal he now possesses an infinitely more dangerous weapon of mass destruction, a nuclear weapon.**

**And while the world waited, while the world talked peace and withdrawal, Saddam Hussein dug in and moved massive forces into Kuwait. While the world waited, while Saddam stalled, more damage was being done to the fragile economies of the Third World, the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, to the entire world, including to our own economy.**

**The U.S., together with the UN, exhausted every means at our disposal to bring this crisis to a peaceful end.**

**However, Saddam clearly felt that by stalling and threatening and defying the UN he could weaken the forces arrayed against him.**

**While the world waited, Saddam Hussein met every overture of peace with open contempt. While the world prayed for peace, Saddam prepared for war.**

**[The Platonic tradition has inculcated the belief that the leader must not accept the status quo, that the pursuit of virtue requires action. A leader must break the constraints imposed by his cautious compatriots, and venture out into the light. If he does not, they will all remain in the darkness of the Cave and suffer even longer under its oppressive fallaciousness. The**

Homeric strain in our culture presses for even more immediate action; the Aristotlean would support those who would look still further for other means to resolve the problem. The Platonic tradition alone supports drastic action, provided that the cause is good and even though the outcome is still unknown.]

I had hoped that when the U.S. Congress, in historic debate, took its resolute action Saddam would realize he could not prevail and would move out of Kuwait in accord with the UN resolutions. He did not do that.

Instead, he remained intransigent, certain that time was on his side. Saddam was warned over and over again to comply with the will of the UN - leave Kuwait or be driven out. Saddam has arrogantly rejected all warnings. Instead, he tried to make this a dispute between Iraq and the United States of America.

Well, he failed. Tonight, 28 nations, countries from five continents - Europe and Asia, Africa and the Arab League - have forces in the gulf area standing shoulder-to-shoulder against Saddam Hussein. These countries had hoped the use of force could be avoided. Regrettably, we now believe that only force will make him leave.

[Here Hussein's contrariness is again contrasted to the Protagorean consensus that has been generated in both the U.S. and among its allies. Further, he is charged with blatant sophistry whose obvious fallaciousness further affirms the righteousness of the consensus achieved by the coalition.]

Prior to ordering our forces into battle, I instructed our military commanders to take every necessary step to prevail as quickly as possible and with the greatest degree of protection possible for American and allied servicemen and women. I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam.

And I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world. And they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back.

[The confidence expressed here draws its appeal from the success we have enjoyed when we followed the analytic processes first set forth by Aristotle: unlike Vietnam, we have a clearly defined end; we have the means available to us in our own military might and the support of our allies; and we have concrete plans that, step by step, will lead us to victory. All that is needed for the successful execution of a natural and inevitable process, according to Aristotle, has been provided to our forces.]

I'm hopeful that this fighting will not go on for long and that casualties will be held to an absolute minimum. This is an historic moment. We have in this past year made great progress in ending the long era of conflict and Cold War. We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order, a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations.

When we are successful, and we will be, we have a real chance at this new world order, an order in which a credible UN can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the UN's founders.

[The vision of the UN's founders was a Platonic vision, one that took the community of nations far beyond any order ever achieved in the past. This conflict is now contextualized by an even greater vision of the "new world order." The Homeric strain in our culture counseled that this war was simply one more dirty job that had to be done; the Aristotlean, that the restoration of the status quo ante--stability in the Gulf--would be a sufficiently legitimate objective. It is the persistence of Platonic idealism in our civic culture which sanctions such an aspiration for a new world order emerging from such a conflict.]

We have no argument with the people of Iraq. Indeed, for the innocents caught in this conflict, I pray for their safety. Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq. It is the liberation of Kuwait.

It is my hope that somehow the Iraqi people can even now convince their dictator that he must lay down his arms, leave Kuwait and let Iraq itself rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.

[This hope--as yet unrealized today--is an expression of our Protagorean optimism that the movement of the people to a democratic consensus will eventually produce actions serving our common interests. It is part of the widespread American optimism about the "natural spread of democracy" when the artificial restraints of totalitarian governments are removed.]

Thomas Paine wrote many years ago: "These are the times that try men's souls." Those well-known words are so very true today.

[The repeated use of this quote from Thomas Paine in our civic culture is itself a demonstration of the persistence of the Homeric vision: individual excellence is best demonstrated through the aggressive response to the challenges set by circumstances.]

But even as planes of the multinational forces attack Iraq, I prefer to think of peace, not war. I am convinced not only that we will prevail, but that out of the horror of combat will come the recognition that no nation can stand against a world united, no nation will be permitted to brutally assault its neighbor.

**[Once again, the Platonic idealism of the new world order is evoked.]**

**No president can easily commit our sons and daughters to war. They are the nation's finest. Ours is an all-volunteer force, magnificently trained, highly motivated. The troops know why they're there. And listen to what they say, for they've said it better than any president or prime minister ever could. Listen to Hollywood Huddleston, Marine lance corporal.**

**He says, "Let's free these people so we can go home and be free again." And he's right. The terrible crimes and tortures committed by Saddam's henchmen against the innocent people of Kuwait are an affront to mankind and a challenge to the freedom of all.**

**Listen to one of our great officers out there, Marine Lieutenant General Walter Boomer. He said, "There are things worth fighting for. A world in which brutality and lawlessness are allowed to go unchecked isn't the kind of world we're going to want to live in."**

**Listen to Master Sergeant J.P. Kendall of the 82nd Airborne. "We're here for more than just the price of a gallon of gas. What we're doing is going to chart the future of the world for the next 100 years. It's better to deal with this guy now than five years from now."**

**And finally, we should all sit up and listen to Jackie Jones, an Army lieutenant, when she says, "If we let him get away with this, who knows what's going to be next?" I've called upon Hollywood and Walter and J.P. and Jackie and all their courageous comrades in arms to do what must be done. Tonight, America and the world are deeply grateful to them and to their families.**

**[This evocative conclusion once again draws its strength from Protagorean consensus, this time concretely demonstrating that consensus by using the words of those most directly affected by the war that is about to begin. But as these soldiers voice the sentiments that have come together in support of the war, they each argue from the different strains of the Athenian paradigm. Corporal Huddleston takes the Homeric perspective, accepting personal responsibility for a dirty job that has to be done; General Boomer and Lieutenant Jones each in their own way echo Aristotle in the premium they place on a naturally just order that must be restored; and Sergeant Kendall voices a Platonic idealism in his implicit hope for a new world order.]**

**And let me say to everyone listening or watching tonight: When the troops we've sent in finish their work, I'm determined to bring them home as soon as possible. Tonight, as our forces fight, they and their families are in our**

prayers. May God bless each and every one of them and the coalition forces at our side in the gulf, and may He continue to bless our nation, the United States of America.

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In this speech, all the strains of the Athenian Paradigm prove their collective worth in effectively evoking the assent of the American people. Although it could be argued that there are inherent contradictions in this speech (if one looks deeply enough), it has an aggregate power that is derived from its successful appeal to the broadest possible range of socio-cultural premisses prevalent in our civic culture. That is the standard to which any attempt at executing strategy must be held in America today.

### ENDNOTES

1. The Greek plural form (sg: *topos*) still used by students of rhetoric and literature today; in Latin, however, they were known as *sedes argumentorum*, i.e., "seats of arguments" or, as I prefer to translate the term, "good bases for good cases." They are also known as *loci communi*, i.e., "common grounds" upon which an argument can be developed; in 16th century treatises on rhetoric, it is translated more literally and often as "commonplaces" and as such has come to be diminished in modern parlance, though highly paid copywriters still employ them as they seek to "grab all the gusto."

2. Diaz-Guerrero defines a socio-cultural premise as "a statement, a *culturally significant statement*, which is held by an operationally defined majority of the subjects in a culture." "A Mexican Psychology" *American Psychologist*, (November, 1977) p. 938. Diaz-Guerrero demonstrates that such socio-cultural premisses can be, and often are, mutually contradictory.